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WHA/AND FOR CUE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PO](#)

SUBJECT: PORTUGUESE ASSESSMENT OF THREATS TO PRESS FREEDOM
IN VENEZUELA

REF: SECSTATE 12181

Classified By: Dana M. Brown, Pol/Econ Officer, Embassy Lisbon
Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Pol-Econ officer met MFA Latin American Desk Officer Leandro Amado to discuss Portugal's views of Venezuela's encroachment on freedom of the press, and to urge that the Government of Portugal (GOP) pressure the Venezuelans to respect free speech. Amado responded that Portugal is watching Venezuela's actions carefully and is concerned with the erosion of the space for public dialogue. Chavez is clearly denying the Radio Caracas TV license (reftel) as a way to silence potential criticism and dissent, according to Amado.

¶2. (C) Nevertheless, he remarked that the Government of Venezuela (GOV) has a legal right to decline a license renewal request if it chooses. He outlined Portugal's efforts to work quietly through demarches and private conversations to press the GOV to maintain an open, democratic dialogue with dissenting voices. Portugal would not be willing to publicly criticize the GOV on this decision, according to Amado, because Venezuela has legal cover for its actions. Amado further commented that, while Venezuela features as a frequent issue of concern in the EU Committee on Latin America (COLAT) meetings, Portugal would be reluctant to participate in a Troika meeting intended to confront Venezuela publicly.

¶3. (C) Comment: Once again, although sympathetic to our concerns, the GOP declines to speak out against Chavez because it fears reprisals against the sizeable Portuguese community residing there. We will continue urging the GOP to use its influence to press the Government of Venezuela on issues of democratic governance and human rights, including in an upcoming meeting with the new MFA Political Director -- and former Ambassador to Venezuela -- Vasco Bramao Ramos.
End comment.
Hoffman